

Western states team up for renewable energy

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Utah is joining several other Western states to work on a plan for developing the region's renewable energy resources to meet the growing need for power throughout the West.

Speaking Wednesday to a standing-room audience in Salt Lake City for the first meeting of the Western Governors' Association's Western Renewable Energy Zones project, Gov. Jon M. Huntsman Jr. said he strongly supports the project's central goal: using areas in the West that have vast renewable resources to expedite the development and delivery of clean energy.

Regardless of who wins the November presidential election, Huntsman said, "we should be prepared as a Western region to hand over the good ideas and the blueprint in terms of where energy policy needs to go."

Huntsman, the association's vice-chairman, said the project will help Western states reach the association's goal of adding 30,000 megawatts of clean and diversified energy by 2015.

Kevin Kolevar, assistant secretary of the U.S. Department of Energy, said the department supports regional efforts to address generation and transmission challenges and will work with the Western Governors' Association to identify renewable energy zones.

"Our nation's existing energy infrastructure cannot stop at the state border," he said. "The Western Renewable Energy Zones project is predicated on this understanding."

The project "creates a new market for new generation of capacity of wind, solar, geothermal, biomass and hydro technology," Kolevar said.

According to the association, the project is a collaboration of governors, public utility commissioners and premiers from 11 states, two Canadian provinces and areas of Mexico. In addition, officials from the U.S. Departments of Energy, Interior, Agriculture and the Federal Energy Regulatory

Commission will serve on the project's steering committee, said Dianne Nielson, Huntsman's state energy adviser.

"We have determined that by working together, we can be more efficient in identifying those resources and probably more effective in bringing them online than if we work as individual states," she said.

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